What Kinds Of Wetlands Occur In Montana?

Riverine wetlands are associated with flowing water of rivers and streams. Examples: sloughs, abandoned meanders, and river and creek margins.

Depressional wetlands are low spots on the landscape. Examples: glacial and prairie potholes, saline basins, wet meadows, and ephemeral ponds.

Artificial wetlands are created by human-related activities. Examples: seeps along irrigation canals.

Jim Stutzman

Depressional wetlands

Pete Husby

Lacustrine fringe

Lacustrine fringe wetlands are associated with lakes or deep water habitats.

Pete Husby

Slope wetlands

Examples: margins around mud flats, lakes, reservoirs and ponds.

Slope wetlands are groundwater discharge areas on a topographic gradient. Examples: sloping wet meadows, subalpine and montane areas of higher elevation, fens, springs and seeps.

What can you do to protect and enhance Montana's wetlands?

- Learn even more about wetlands
- Preserve or, better yet, increase vegetative buffers around open waters
- Prevent invasion by noxious weeds and replace with native plants
- Place bird nesting boxes, snags, stumps, logs and brush piles to create habitat
- Fence to control over-used trails, livestock areas, and stream banks
- Prevent entry by off-road vehicles and other forms of heavy recreational use
- Exclude domestic pets from wetland areas
- Prevent pollutants from reaching storm drains
- Remove fill and prevent dumping
- Delay mowing or haying grassy areas until birds are done nesting

For More Information

Or to request additional materials on wetlands and wetland-related programs available in the state, contact the Montana Watercourse at 406-994-6671.

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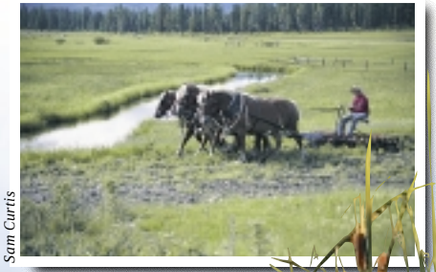
Montana's Wetlands & You - A Natural Partnership

Montana Is Fortunate To Possess A Wealth And Variety Of Wetlands Within Its Borders

For many years though, wetlands were considered wastelands. The federal government even encouraged draining and filling them. It is estimated that about one-fourth of Montana's wetlands have been lost to agriculture and urbanization.

Today, the essential role wetlands play is recognized. These areas provide crucial wildlife habitat, improved water quality, and flood control. This new knowledge should lead us all to consider wetlands as our *natural partners* in the effort to keep Montana the "last best place."



Sam Curtis

Wetlands, ranching, and farming can successfully coexist.

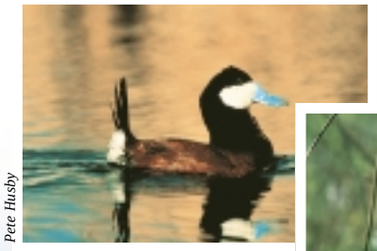
Why Are Wetlands Important?

We now understand the importance of keeping natural wetland systems healthy. Montana's remaining wetlands comprise less than 1% of our total land area.

Though they are small in number, their benefits are many. Wetlands:

Terry Lonner

- Soak up large volumes of water and gradually release it to adjacent streams or water bodies during low flow periods
- Recharge wells and aquifers by holding water long enough to allow it to percolate into underlying soil
- Support vegetation that acts as a flood buffer and stabilizes the shoreline
- Enhance water quality by absorbing sediments, toxins and nutrients
- Decompose organic matter and incorporate nutrients back into the food chain
- Provide habitat for millions of birds, mammals, reptiles, fish and amphibians



Pete Husby

ruddy duck

Pete Husby

Ute ladies tresses

- Protect habitat for threatened and endangered species (in Montana, 39 percent of endangered species are found in or are dependent on wetlands)

Do You Have A Wetland?

Do you have a place on your land where you watch ducks or where your tractor seems to always get stuck? If so, you could have a wetland! In wetlands, water is often on or near the surface all or part of the year; the soil is poorly drained and may look gray; and water-tolerant plants such as cottonwoods, willows, cattails, rushes, and sedges may be present. Still, identifying wetlands can be challenging.

What To Look For...?

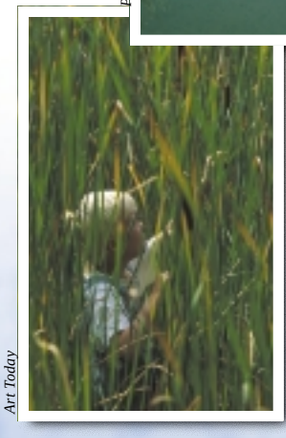
Generally, three clues are present:

Pete Husby

- *hydric soils:* "wet" soils that are poorly drained and develop certain soil characteristics

Pete Husby

- *wetland hydrology:* water at or near the land surface, all or part of the year



Art Today

- *hydrophytes:* "water-loving" plants adapt-ed to life in wet soils

If It's A Wetland, It's Wet - Right? Well, Not Exactly.

As you can see, the amount of moisture in a wetland can greatly vary over the course of a year. During some seasons, a wetland may actually be dry.

Temporarily flooded pothole wetlands fill in the spring...

Ducks Unlimited, Inc. photos

By fall, the wetland may no longer be wet.

How Can You Be Sure You Have A Wetland?

If you think your land contains a wetland, check with a wetland specialist. These folks work for agencies like the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) while others are private consultants. Be sure to accompany this person so you can understand exactly where the wetland is and what its characteristics are. The specialist can also give you the names of people you need to contact about projects that might affect the wetland. Most land management practices, building projects, and other actions that occur in or near wetlands require state and/or federal permits.

Dean Vaughan